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General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

199th Meeting
Friday, 19 April 1996, 11 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Hoffmann . . . . . (Germany)

The meeting was called to order at 11.30 a.m.

Organization of work

The Chairman: As members will recall, the Disarmament Commission resumed its organizational session on 13 March 1996 to deal with organizational matters related to the 1996 substantive session: dates and duration, the election of a Bureau, the establishment of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission, and the draft provisional agenda for the substantive session. However, owing to the lack of consensus on a third substantive item for the provisional agenda, the Commission decided to continue its consultations on this issue. Following efforts by Member States, I am now convening this meeting to see how far we can proceed.

I propose today to discuss the election of the remaining Vice-Chairmen, the draft provisional agenda — specifically item 5 — the appointment of chairmen of the subsidiary bodies, the dates and duration of the 1996 substantive session, the programme of work, and any other business that may arise.

Does any member wish to comment?

Mr. Fridegotto (Italy): On behalf of the European Union, let me express our heartfelt appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman, for convening today's resumed organizational session of the Disarmament Commission. We are confident that under your able guidance the meeting will be fruitful. We assure you of our active cooperation.

At the first meeting of the resumed organizational session, on 13 March, the European Union welcomed the constructive approach taken by Ambassador García of Colombia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement in expressing willingness to contribute to building a consensus on a package which foresees holding the Disarmament Commission's substantive session for two weeks and a day beginning on 22 April, including an item on the agenda entitled "Principles and guidelines on nuclear weapon-free zones", and the addition of a third item entitled "Exchange of views on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament". We hope that agreement can be reached along these lines. We invite delegations to speak in support of this package, and urge all parties to remain flexible.

Mr. Borda (Colombia) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, Sir, I reiterate our satisfaction at your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission at its 1996 substantive session.

The Disarmament Commission is a deliberative subsidiary body of the General Assembly in which all Members of the Organization participate. The Non-Aligned Movement therefore attaches the greatest importance to the Commission and is committed to strengthening it.

Accordingly, in recent months, we, like other delegations and groups of countries, have been taking part in consultations on the duration and programme of work of the 1996 session in a constructive spirit.

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With regard to the duration of the session, we have concurred that, on this occasion, in the light of the overall calendar of meetings on disarmament and, without this constituting a precedent, the duration of the substantive session should be two weeks plus one day.

As to the agenda, the substantive session which is to begin next Monday will have the task of completing the work entrusted to Working Group I, on international arms transfers, with particular reference to General Assembly resolution 46/36 H of 6 December 1991.

We will also take up as a third substantive item the exchange of views on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

With regard to a second substantive item, which is awaiting definition, consultations have been taking place within the Non-Aligned Movement and with other delegations and groups of countries. Yesterday, members of the Movement considered proposals for that agenda item. It was agreed that the members of the Non-Aligned Movement would put forward proposals in keeping with their national positions.

Also at yesterday's meeting, the Movement agreed to nominate the Permanent Representative of Mongolia, His Excellency Ambassador Luvsangiin Erdenechuluun, as Chairman of the working group on the item entitled "Exchange of views on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament".

Lastly, let me reiterate our willingness to participate constructively in the work of the Disarmament Commission. We are convinced that the best way of strengthening the Commission is by contributing to help it achieve tangible results.

Election of officers

The Chairman: Members will recall that at the 197th plenary meeting, held on 11 December 1995, the Commission elected its Chairman, four Vice-Chairmen, namely Finland, Pakistan, Poland and Ukraine, and the Rapporteur, Mr. Rajab Sukayri of Jordan. However, four more Vice-Chairmen remain to be elected: two from the Group of African States and two from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

I am informed that the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States has endorsed the candidacy of Columbia for one of these vice-chairmanships. Are there candidates for the remaining three vice-chairmanships?

Mr. García: (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I wish to beg your pardon, Sir, for not participating in the first part of the meeting; regrettably, I was engaged elsewhere.

As to your question, Sir, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States met yesterday; as of that time there were no other candidacies. We hope that this situation will be overcome and that we will very soon have a second Vice-Chairman from the Latin American and Caribbean region.

The Chairman: If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Disarmament Commission wishes to elect Colombia as a Vice-Chairman for this year.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I appeal to the Group of African States to provide us with two candidates for vice-chairmanships, and to the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States to provide one additional candidate. I would like them to be elected on Monday, 22 April 1996 at our first plenary meeting so that they can participate at the meeting of the Bureau to be held on Tuesday, 23 April.

Draft provisional agenda for the 1996 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission

The Chairman: During the past few months, there have been very intensive consultations, and it is clear that we have decided that there should be three substantive items. The first item is "International arms transfers, with particular reference to resolution 46/36 H, of 6 December 1991". The second item is to be added. The third item is "Exchange of views on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament".

Our difficulty, then, is with the second substantive item. It is understood that this should be a subject related to nuclear issues, with its exact title subject to further consultations. It has been proposed to have an item entitled "General principles and guidelines for nuclear-weapon-free zones or zones of peace". I am not sure if this is acceptable to everybody.

As Colombia, coordinator of the non-aligned group, has just stated, members of the Movement will speak for themselves on this item. Therefore, I open the debate on the question of what the nuclear item should be this year. Is there any objection to having "General principles and guidelines for nuclear weapon-free zones or zones of peace" as the second substantive item?

Mr. Surie (India): For reasons which have been stated on several occasions and which are well known to this body, my delegation would have serious difficulty with that item.

The Chairman: That was indeed my understanding. We have played with different scenarios and, from all the discussions I have had with other delegations, I have the impression that India is the only delegation that has this difficulty. Of course we respect that. The question is whether the Indian delegation would accept a "consensus minus one" on this issue.

Mr. Surie (India): My delegation does not have the authority to accept "consensus minus one" on this issue. I might add that various options have been discussed in informal consultations among delegations, some of which my delegation can agree to. The Chairman of the non-aligned group is continuing these consultations, and I believe that he will need more time. If the consultations do not succeed, my delegation will be able to go along with some of the options that have been under discussion in the Non-Aligned Movement, but not with this item.

The Chairman: Now the ball is with the representative of Colombia. Do you need more time for consultations, Sir? Must we postpone a decision?

Mr. García (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): We have held consultations over recent weeks, but unfortunately they have not produced an agreement. I believe that, as we have invested time and effort, we should again try to reach agreement on the issue. As chairman of the non-aligned group, Colombia is prepared to continue the effort to reach an agreement.

The Chairman: I am grateful that Colombia and other delegations have put in so much effort. I am inclined to accord more time to this item.

Mr. Abdel Aziz (Egypt): First, I would like to express my delegation's satisfaction at seeing you in the Chair, Sir. Of course it is also a source of satisfaction that we will continue to see you here for the next two weeks.

My delegation supports the original statement made by the representative of Colombia with regard to the last meeting of the non-aligned group, at which we agreed that every delegation would be free to express its national position on this issue. In fact, we have been discussing this subject for the last five, if not six, months. We can, of course, allow more time for consultations, but I do not see any realistic prospects for reaching an agreement. We must begin our work, organize and prepare ourselves for the general debate scheduled to begin on Monday. We ought to know exactly what we will be discussing.

My delegation would have no difficulties at all with an item on nuclear-weapon-free zones. That might not be the case, if the subject were discussed in the context of "Principles and guidelines on nuclear-weapon-free zones", but only if it dealt with the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones as a general item. We would like to have everyone on board on this item, including India and others that may have difficulties. We must work to satisfy their needs in order to have 100-per-cent agreement on the item.

I want to refer to a proposal made, in an attempt to reach a compromise, during our work in the non-aligned group, and find out whether it could provide a basis for our work. That proposal reads as follows: "Non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects, including regional arrangements, such as nuclear-weapons-free zones". It seemed to my delegation that this formulation received widespread support in non-aligned group, and we were about to conclude our work on the basis of it. I understand that it might raise questions for other delegations, so it might be useful for us to have a brief discussion to see whether it could fly as a third item. Of course, if we end up in deadlock, we could have more time or more consultations.

The Chairman: I believe that I have heard that formulation before. Unfortunately, I have heard negative comments about it from some delegations. So I am not sure whether it would fly.

Mr. Fridegotto (Italy): The European Union was able to have consultations on that proposal, and I am sorry to say that it was not acceptable to the European Union.

The Chairman: See what I mean? This is why things are so difficult this year. My inclination is to give the non-aligned group a little more time to come up with a nuclear item that is acceptable to everyone. I hope that

it will deal with the question of nuclear-weapon-free zones in wording acceptable to everybody. This has practical repercussions for our work. Members may recall that on the draft agenda distributed at our last meeting, on which we agreed in principle, item number 5 was "to be added". We would normally adopt the agenda on the first day of our substantive session — Monday, 22 April in this instance — and thereby turn the provisional agenda into the agenda of the session. But with item number 5 still pending, our agenda will still be provisional, and will not be able to adopt it formally. On the other hand, we will of course start work. We will not simply stop in our tracks merely to discuss agenda item 5.

I therefore propose — here again we rely on Ambassador García — that internal discussions should continue on the question of agenda item 5, and in the meantime that we go on with our work. That is, we should start the general debate on Monday, after having settled — as far as they can be settled — the organizational questions that are still open, and continue that debate on Tuesday morning. We discussed in the Bureau the question of how long this situation could drag on. We agreed that the Commission should do substantive work during the coming two weeks, and not be distracted by a procedural debate about what it should be working on. I therefore think that we should set next Wednesday as a deadline. That should provide enough time to produce a result either way. We could probably have an informal meeting of the full Commission on this item on Wednesday afternoon. But that would be the last opportunity to resolve this question, because, as I said, we are not here to discuss procedural matters only. If this is agreeable, I will proceed in that way.

Mr. Moradi (Islamic Republic of Iran): We have no objections to the non-aligned group continuing consultations on the question of nuclear-weapon-free zones, or on any other alternative item. But the non-aligned group has had intensive consultations on this issue, and has tried various formulations with no result. Given the short time that is available, if the non-aligned group eventually reaches a formulation for a third item, there is no guarantee that it will be acceptable to member States outside the non-aligned group, and we will lose a lot of time discussing the issue.

I wonder whether it would be feasible for consultations to be held under your chairmanship, Sir, to which the most interested delegations would be invited, to see if there is a way to handle this issue. Most members of the Non-Aligned Movement prefer an item on nuclear-weapon-free zones. But the question is not just for the Non-Aligned Movement but for all the States members of this body.

Mr. Sulaiman (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): My delegation entirely agrees with your view, Sir, that we should reach agreement on a third item as soon as possible in order to be able to discuss the other items. The representative of Colombia, speaking on behalf of the non-aligned group, has said that the non-aligned States, after lengthy consultations, had not reached agreement on the subject. Delegations will therefore make their own individual proposals to be discussed by the Commission.

With respect to your having asked the representative of Colombia to continue discussions on the subject, Sir, it must be said that this issue is of concern not only to non-aligned countries, but to all countries in the Organization, because the agenda item will be discussed by all. As they will not be proposed on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, proposals will come from individual countries, and will be commented on individually by other countries.

In our view, the proposal made earlier by the representative of Egypt, which referred to all aspects of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, is a sound proposal.

I agree that the question of a third item could be dealt with by asking delegations to examine the issue more closely to provide more clarity on which precise proposals could be acceptable in the future.

Mr. Abdel Aziz (Egypt): My delegation supports the proposal made by the representative of Iran. We do not believe that either the time available at this stage we have reached in our deliberations would allow us time to reach an agreement in the non-aligned group. If we reached such an agreement, we could not guarantee that it would gain the approval of the other parties. With all due respect to Ambassador García's capable handling of this question over the past five months, it is not for the Chairman, or a limited number of members of the group to decide what the whole group will approve.

We would therefore support the proposal made by Iran for informal consultations under your capable guidance, Sir, so that everybody could contribute in a very informal gathering at which we could discuss all possibilities — those of the non-aligned group, and those

of the European Union as well as other possibilities — in order to reach a collective agreement on a third item.

I fear that if we just stick to the suggestion that the non-aligned group should hold consultations, the group might reach agreement on an item which would not be acceptable to other parties. Then we would lose the time from now until Monday or Tuesday, and at our Wednesday meeting we would still be in the same position as we are today.

My second point is in the nature of a question. Are we going to have a general debate on two items and then decide on the third item? The general debate usually covers all agenda items. I do not foresee my delegation making a statement in the general debate on two items to find that, on Wednesday, after we have finished the general debate, it has been decided to add a third item. When would we be able to make general comments on this third item? And are we going to lose one or two meetings to have general comments again on that item?

This is a tricky question, but I am sure, Sir, that with your well-known experience you will be able to handle this matter. We therefore leave it up to you to decide where exactly we stand with regard to the general debate.

The Chairman: Of course, the Commission cannot debate an item it does not know. It is therefore quite clear that at the beginning of our session, there can be a general debate only on the two known items. However, I will propose holding another plenary meeting — a stock-taking meeting — on Tuesday, 30 April. That would provide an opportunity for us to have a general debate on the third item if we have decided on such an item by that time.

Mr. [illegible] (Colombia) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: Obviously, our initial reaction is positive to the proposal that we should continue consultations on this issue. We have been seeking agreement for months: why not continue? But following what some colleagues, such as those from Iran, Syria and Egypt, have said it is quite clear that it is quite possible that we could reach agreement within the non-aligned group. As of yesterday there were 29 items on our list. Clearly, a large number of those could achieve consensus within the Movement, but we know that an item which might achieve consensus within our group might well not receive the same consensus among other delegations or other groups.

Thus, in order to speed up the process of consultation, we might ask Ambassador Hoffmann to participate in these consultations himself. Of course we will contribute whatever we can by participating, but if we broaden the framework of the consultations, then perhaps we could reach agreement much faster. We are, of course, ready to support Mr. Hoffmann in any way.

Mr. Parnohadiningrat (Indonesia): On behalf of the Indonesian delegation, Sir, I should like to express our satisfaction at seeing you chairing this resumed organizational session of the Disarmament Commission. My delegation is confident that under your able guidance our deliberations will reach a successful conclusion.

Regarding the item remaining to be defined by the Commission, the Indonesian delegation would like to support the Iranian proposal and, at the same time, would want the proposal made by Egypt to be one of the options to be discussed during the informal consultations proposed by Iran.

As we understand it, a rejection of this item has already been stated, but we still hope that there will be a breakthrough as a result of this option and others that might be proposed.

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) *(interpretation from French)*: I should like to start, Sir, by adding my congratulations to those that have already been expressed. We will do so again in a more formal way during the substantive session, but for now we wish to say that we are confident that your leadership will bring us useful results.

My delegation supports consultations under your chairmanship, Sir, to include interested delegations from other groups. It is true that there is a time factor here, but it is important that we should achieve the kind of agreement which would give us the broadest possible consensus.

Mr. González Bustos (Mexico) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: My delegation considers that the proposal made by the representative of Iran has much merit. It is our view that in the light of what was stated by the representative of Colombia on behalf of the non-aligned group, we should set up a broader group of all delegations in order to take a decision. This is not a new situation for the Commission. We have had the same experience in the past and I am sure that we can rely on the same procedure yet again to achieve consensus.

Mr. Surie (India): My delegation will of course very warmly support any consultations which you, Mr. Chairman, may wish to undertake in order to achieve consensus on a third item.

Mr. King (United States of America): We too are pleased, Sir, to see you in the Chair. You can, of course, expect the full cooperation of our delegation as you try to achieve consensus, especially on this issue. We of course support what I think is the broadly supported desire to see this item consist of the principles and guidelines on nuclear-weapon-free zones, which we feel would give the proper degree of focused attention to an important item.

I also wish to mention that in so far as the previous intervention of the representative of India is concerned, we fully support him in his refusal to accept the principle of "consensus minus one" as a basis for doing business. We would also support what I believe is this body's earnest desire to see all business conducted on a consensus basis, which is necessary to achieve the best kind of understanding.

In this regard we were also pleased to hear in your response to the Indian delegation that you also recognize this.

The Chairman: As always, the Chairman is in the hands of the members, not the other way around. I am therefore prepared to lead such consultations. Members will be pleased to hear that Conference Room A is available this afternoon, to shorten our week-end.

I therefore invite all representatives to join me in Conference Room A at 3 p.m. I expect the key delegations to be there so that we can have a meaningful discussion.

Mr. Surie (India): I have no difficulty at all, Sir, in joining your consultations. I only request that the time be a little later, because there are two meetings I already have to attend at 3 p.m. Could you make it a little later, 4 p.m. perhaps? I know this is Friday afternoon, and I apologize for this. But I really have no option.

The Chairman: I admire your being able to attend two meetings at the same time, and do not want to burden you with a third one. Under these circumstances, is 4 p.m. all right for everybody? The meeting will probably be shorter if we start cutting into the weekend.

Mr. Sulaiman: (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It is our view that this 4 o'clock meeting will not be the only opportunity, and are reasonably certain that we will be able to have simultaneous interpretation at subsequent meetings. I do not think that Room A has simultaneous interpretation equipment. For subsequent meetings, I think that the necessary weight should be given to the issue of interpretation.

The Chairman: Our problem is that we will have no interpretation. These are informal consultations, so they are normally done without interpretation. The informal plenary meeting that I had originally planned for next Wednesday as a last ditch effort would have had interpretation, but I am afraid that this afternoon we will have no interpretation at our disposal.

At the same time, however, I must point out that I want to be serious about this. It is of no use to meet this afternoon — as I said, to shorten our weekend — and then still have this dragging on next week. So it is my intention to reach a conclusion informally this afternoon and have it formalized early next week.

The good news is that we could remain in this Chamber, with interpretation. Do members want to meet here with interpretation or to meet in Room A? I see some nodding in favour of this Chamber with interpretation. We will meet in this Chamber at 4 p.m., as promptly as possible.

Organization of work

The Chairman: We now turn to the appointment of chairmen of subsidiary bodies. So far we have two working groups for which we need chairmen. Mr. Gheorghe Chirila, Deputy Permanent Representative of Romania to the United Nations, has been nominated by the group of Eastern European States as Chairman of the Working Group on "International arms transfers, with particular reference to resolution 46/36 H of 6 December 1991".

The non-aligned group has nominated Ambassador Luvsangiin Erdenechuluun of Mongolia for the chairmanship of the working group on "Exchange of views on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament".

May I take it that the Commission wishes to appoint those two representatives to the chairmanships of those two working groups?

It was so decided.

The Chairman: Regarding the dates and duration of our substantive session, members will recall that at our last plenary meeting we tentatively agreed that the 1996 substantive session should be held from 22 April to 7 May. As a matter of fact, it is clear that substantive work will be finished on 3 May. On the following Monday, 6 May, there will be no meeting; that day will be set aside for the Secretariat to prepare our report to the General Assembly. On 7 May the report will be adopted. In this connection, as has already been stated this morning, it is understood that this duration should not set a precedent for the future.

May I take it that this time-frame is acceptable to members of the Commission?

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I call on Ambassador Erdenechuluun.

Mr. Erdenechuluun (Mongolia): I apologize for asking to speak at this stage, but I wanted to make a very brief congratulatory remark to you, Sir, because I was, as all of you remember, Chairman of the United Nations Disarmament Commission in 1995. I am sure that I am expressing the sentiments of the entire Commission when I say how happy we are to see you chairing the Commission this year. Your expertise and immense experience on disarmament issues, especially on the Commission's disarmament issues, will no doubt be an important asset and a sure guarantee of the success of our work this year.

Secondly, with your indulgence, Sir, I want to thank the representative of Colombia, the Chairman of the non-aligned group, and the entire membership of the Non-Aligned Movement for proposing my name for the chairmanship of the working group on the fourth special session. I also want to thank all the members of the Commission for the trust and confidence they bestowed upon me in appointing me as Chairman of the working group.

I assure you, Sir, and through you the entire membership, that I will do my utmost to justify the expectations of all the members of the Commission.

The Chairman: I call now on the representative of Romania.

Mr. Chirila (Romania): On the same note on which the representative of Mongolia just spoke, I would like, first of all, Sir, to welcome you warmly as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission for this year's session. Your well-known diplomatic and disarmament-related skills will surely be important assets for our work this session.

I also thank the Eastern European group and other delegations here for nominating me as Chairman of the working group on international arms transfers. I am aware that the work before us is quite heavy. But at the same time, Sir, it is promising, thanks to your personal contribution last year to this agenda item. I myself feel a moral obligation to continue your work and to try to achieve positive results — at least under this agenda item.

With these words, I thank you, Sir, and promise you my full cooperation.

Programme of work for the 1996 substantive session

The Chairman: Members have received document A/CN.10/1996/CRP.1. This is a programme of work that is of an indicative nature and subject to change, if necessary; the Bureau will decide on the exact weekly programme in consultation with the Chairmen of the working groups. We will distribute the programme of work for next week on Monday. I can also say that, as far as I see it, the meetings of subsidiary bodies on Tuesday morning, 23 April will not take place; we will instead continue the general debate.

May I take it that the Commission adopts this programme of work, on a very flexible basis?

It was so decided.

The Chairman: This leads me to note that I intend to close the list of speakers on Monday, 22 April at 1 p.m. This is, therefore, the last call, and I urge representatives to place their names on the list as soon as possible.

Other business

Mr. Desagneaux (France) (*interpretation from French*): I would like to make a general comment, following up on the very relevant point raised by the delegate of Syria.

We have received a programme of work. I note that it is in only one language. For my part, I regret that. I would simply like to say that in the preparation of the work of the Commission, my delegation will be particularly attentive to the linguistic problem and especially to the question of translation. Naturally, my delegation has full confidence in your skilis, Sir, in ensuring strict observance of these rules.

The Chairman: The problem apparently is that we have certain financial constraints, and that conference room papers have to date been issued in English only. If we want to change this practice in a way that will cost more money, we will have to take a decision to that effect. I do not know whether this is necessary or not. I cannot judge, because German unfortunately is not a United Nations language, so I do not have this problem in this case.

Mr. Abdel Aziz (Egypt): On a procedural issue with regard to the this afternoon's 4 p.m. meeting, I wonder whether between now and 4 p.m., the Secretariat could arrange for us to have the meeting in Conference Room 5 or 6 — one of the smaller rooms — instead of having informal consultations in this chamber. I am sure that a smaller room would be much more conducive to the informal spirit of the meeting. Maybe it would facilitate the discussions. It is very difficult in such a big room to have an informal meeting and to have discussions of an informal nature.

The Chairman: I understand that there is simply no other room available. I have difficulty in recognizing who is asking to speak: I have to send somebody to read the name plates. But I think we will have to make do if we want to have interpretation. Otherwise, we have to go to Room A or Room B.

Mr. Surie (India): I suspect, Sir, that one of the meetings which I have to attend, in Conference Room 8, will not last very long. If that meeting ends early, we could perhaps meet there. I believe there will be interpretation facilities available.

The Chairman: Yes, there are facilities in Conference Room 8. Shall we meet in front of Room 8 — hopping from one leg to the other — and see whether the room will be available?

I call on the Secretary of the Commission.

Mr. Lin: Meetings Services will have to inform us very soon. Otherwise we will be unable to inform members about the meeting place unless we put a notice on the door to direct delegations to the correct conference room.

The Chairman: I have just been informed that Room 7 will be available as of 4 p.m. On this happy note, shall we adjourn and meet again this afternoon at 4 p.m. in Room 7?

It was so decided.

Closure of the session

The Chairman: I declare the organizational session of the Disarmament Commission closed.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.